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Substitutes, an identification guide.**

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Book Review

Chinese Medicinal Plants, Herbal Drugs and Substitutes, an identification guide.

Christine Leon and Lin Yu-Lin, Kew Publishing, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, UK. pp 806, over 3,000 colour photographs, 300mm x 250mm. ISBN: 978 1 84246 387 1, e-ISBN: 978 1 84246 630 8 (Hardback) - £110.00

Adulteration of medicinal plants with incorrect species is a global problem and one that is difficult to control. The globalisation of Chinese medicine has resulted in mass export of Chinese plant drugs around the world and significantly changed the way herbal medicine is practised in many countries. While Chinese medicine may have much to offer, it is particularly difficult for non-Chinese speakers to navigate their way through the thousands of medicinal plants available and to be able to differentiate bona-fide plants, and their legitimate clinical substitutes from un-official (adulterant) species. Until now, very little has been published in English on this subject and so this book is both timely and in absolute need.

The inside cover quickly reveals the magnitude of this book. The fieldwork that enabled the book to be written was conducted from 1998 to 2013 and covered most of the Chinese provinces, from Uyghur bordering Afghanistan in the West to Zhejiang on the East coast, and from Jilin in the far Northwest bordering North Korea to Hainan Island in the South China Sea. A total of twenty one Chinese provinces were visited. For one of the authors, Christine Leon it has been a prominent factor in her ground breaking work at Kew Gardens and through its publication she was awarded a PhD. This achievement not only gives an insight into the amount of time and effort it can take to produce a piece of work such as this but also recognises and illuminates its academic importance.

The layout of the book is very user friendly, it is organised and colour coded in terms of the parts of the plants used (botanical drugs) e.g. rhizomes, roots, tubers and bulbs, as one section, making it very user friendly for those involved in either Chinese medicine or Chinese pharmacy. The colour photos are outstanding and include photos of different stages of growth of the living plants. In this way the authors have captured many of the plant species in their flowering stage, alongside these are photographs of the plant once it has been harvested, cut and dried.

Information on 226 individual species and the possible substitute and/or adulterant species is presented in great detail, including the pin yin name, Chinese character, scientific name plus any synonyms, the traditional properties and uses of the plants and the modern medical indications. There is also important information on harvesting and sourcing from the wild along with each plants conservation status.

For each medicinal plant, the reader is guided through how to recognise the authentic plant from substituted species both in the natural state and the dried. It is obvious that the authors have followed the supply chain of many of these plants and have developed an insider's knowledge of which species are most affected by substitution and which plants are the likely species to be used as the substitutes. This kind of knowledge is usually difficult to find without detailed investigative fieldwork and is one of the many treasures to be found within this book.

This is an invaluable book for anyone involved in ethnopharmacy, pharmacognosy or Chinese medicine practise, but it also reaches farther afield and will be certainly be of great interest to natural product scientists, botanists, ecologists, ethnobotanists and medical anthropologists. As well as individuals, it is an absolute must for colleges and universities with any kind of programme concerning medicinal plants.

As we move towards a more regulated market for medicinal plants and more resources are directed towards quality assurance, suppliers of these plants will need to ensure that they have the necessary quality systems in place to show that their products are of good quality and authentic. This book will play a major part in helping suppliers to achieve this and consequently help to keep the end users of these medicines, i.e. the general public, safe.

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